Interview with John Howard Burns

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR JOHN HOWARD BURNS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Could you tell me in the first place when and where you were born and a bit about your family?

BURNS: I was born in a small town in Oklahoma, Pauls Valley. My parents had both been born in an even smaller town in Texas, called Albany. And my father had gone to Oklahoma shortly before statehood. I suppose he thought this was sort of a new frontier.

Q: A Sooner?

BURNS: No, he wasn't a Sooner by any means. The state had already been well opened, but it was before statehood, about two years. Then about a year after statehood he married his childhood sweetheart and established what they thought was going to be a short-time home in Oklahoma; but it turned out to be their life-time home. I was born there, went to high school there and to the University of Oklahoma.

Q: What type of business was your father in?

BURNS: He was originally in the hardware business and then this rather expanded into landholdings and things of that nature.

Q: Was your mother a housewife, or...?

BURNS: Yes, she was entirely a housewife, a homemaker.

Q: When did you go to university then?

BURNS: I went for three semesters to a small college in Ohio, called Denison, and then I returned to the University of Oklahoma, having earlier failed the Foreign Service Examination. My mother's brother and most of her nephews had gone to Princeton and it was my thought that I would also go there. But I failed the college entrance exam; did I say Foreign Service Exam? I meant the College Entrance Examination.

Q: What did you take at the University of Oklahoma?

BURNS: I studied Government, or Political Science, actually with the hope of going into the Foreign Service. That was a very early ambition.

Q: How did this come about? A lot of people from the eastern and western seaboard have never even heard about the Foreign Service Exam...

BURNS: It was a rather curious thing. It was when I was actually in junior high school and I had been kept after school in a history class to do make-up work, or something. The teacher was a remarkable woman; her name was Maude Drain. I was the only person in the schoolroom and I was working on whatever it was and she said: “What do you plan to do? Are you going to go to college?” And I said, “Yes.” And she said, “What do you plan to study?” I said, “I don't know.” Then she said: “I've often thought that if I had been a man I would have loved to have gone into the Diplomatic Service.” At that point I didn't know anything about it, and she talked for about an hour. She made it sound so attractive that I began reading about it and decided that it was exactly what I wanted to do. Years later when I passed the Foreign Service Examination, I wrote Miss Drain. She was no

longer in Pauls Valley but I found her address somewhere. In response I had the most heartwarming letter I've ever received.

Q: While you were taking government were you getting any insight into the field of Foreign Service diplomacy at the University of Oklahoma?

BURNS: No, not really. No one else there was thinking about the Foreign Service. Actually, the year that I graduated I made my first trip to Europe and then six years later when I was taking the Oral Examinations, reference was made to that trip and one of the examiners asked me, “With this longstanding interest” (I had told them pretty much what I just told you) “in the Foreign Service, how many of our Embassies and Consulates did you visit during your trip.” As I hadn't gone to any, it was a pretty embarrassing question. I just said I hadn't had any reason to do, to call on them for any help, and I didn't feel that they'd welcome casual callers.

Q: You graduated in 1935, this was in the midst of the Depression, and from reading John Steinbeck—I lived in California at the time—it seemed as if the whole population of Oklahoma was heading towards California.

BURNS: That's quite true, that's where the word Okie came from, which subsequently has become a real psychological handicap to the state; they hated that word. The dust storms were not by any means limited to Oklahoma; Kansas, Texas, New Mexico, the whole southwest was brutally damaged by the dust storms of the early 1930s. I don't know how many Oklahomans moved to California, but a great many.

Q: Could you talk a little about your trip to Europe in the summer of 1935, which was a very interesting time because you got a look at the pre-war world.

BURNS: Yes. In Italy troops were on trains going to Ethiopia. I went with a college friend who at that time was in Harvard Law School and a friend of his from Harvard. The three of us went together. We biked in England and just rode on trains, mostly at night to save

hotel bills, on the continent. In Italy, the trains going south were loaded with troops headed for Ethiopia and troops were goose-stepping around the streets in Germany.

Q: Well, did you feel the heavy hand of...

BURNS: Not really. Anyone that age doesn't feel the heavy hand. It was a very lighthearted time of life. We had gone over third class on the Holland American Line's old Veendam, which was loaded with college students, and we kept running into them here and there.

Q: What did you do after you graduated from college?

BURNS: I came back and worked for my father. I didn't think I could pass the Foreign Service Exam and there were several years during the Depression when they were not even given. Anyway, I did not even attempt them until I came to Washington in 1940 to work for Congressman Mike Monroney.

Q: So you worked for your father until 1940. What brought you to Washington?

BURNS: Congressman, and then later Senator, Mike Monroney had filed for Congress and he was a new type of politician for Oklahoma. I had not met him at the time but volunteered to work in my county, and made speeches for him at rural schoolhouse meetings every night. He was elected and I came to Washington to work in his office.

Q: Could you characterize him, as a politician?

BURNS: He was a breath of fresh air in Oklahoma politics. He was not a lawyer but a newspaperman who had majored in journalism in college. He had inherited his father's furniture store in Oklahoma City, and was running it when he was elected, but originally he had intended to be a journalist. He was an extremely popular member of the Senate, as you may or may not remember.

Q: You worked for him from 1940 to '41?

BURNS: Yes, and that's where I first learned about cram courses for the Foreign Service. An ad for Turner's Diplomatic School came to every congressional office one day and I happened to see it. I talked to Colonel Turner and enrolled. Mike said to take whatever time I needed and kept me on his payroll, so he was a great benefactor of mine.

Q: Could you talk a little about these cram schools? There was Roudebush.

BURNS: Yes, Roudebush and Mannix Walker and Turner.

Q: What did you do when you went to one of those?

BURNS: Actually I took what was called the short summer course, and there were lectures every afternoon. Our economics lecturer was Edward Acheson, who was the brother of the later Secretary Dean Acheson. Colonel Turner taught International and Maritime Law, and there was a History professor. On the side I studied French with Jean Byington McMillan the daughter of the former Chief of Personnel, Homer Byington. In the class were a remarkable number of men who came into the Foreign Service that year. Stuart Rockwell, Mac Godley, Fisher Howe, Bill Crawford, a remarkable number. Forty-four passed the written and oral exams that year and I think about 18 of them came from Turner's.

Q: That was the three and a half day exam that you took?

BURNS: Yes.

Q: You took that then in '41?

BURNS: No, it was in September of 1940, over an old Murphy's store off F Street. I don't know about the other cram schools, but Turner's schooled you in taking exams as much

as they did in the substance of the exam. We were constantly writing exams in the cram school, under a time pressure and that practice helped when the real exam came along.

Q: Also, the exams then were mainly written. That three and a half day exam was essentially a written exam not a check-off kind.

BURNS: Oh yes. I think there were two or three that were multiple choice, but the main examinations were written.

Q: Well, then, you passed it and took the oral exam?

BURNS: Yes. The Oral Exams were held in January of 1941.

Q: Could you describe the oral exam in that period?

BURNS: Well, there was a panel... I can't recall how many there were on the panel but I remember one person who was on my panel, Maxwell Hamilton. He was later Ambassador to Finland. It lasted about half an hour and I'm afraid I've sat on so many oral panels since then that memories of my own have faded. I do remember one member of the panel asked me to describe a typical day in a congressman's office and I rambled on so long on that one they finally cut me off and said, “I think we get the idea. If we're going to ask you anything else we'd better get on with it.”

Q: Did you come into the Foreign Service right away?

BURNS: In the summer. There was, as so often happens, a budget crisis at the time so there were delays in the appointment of officers. But there were funds for clerks so many of those who had passed the exams went to their posts in that category and were subsequently commissioned as vice consuls.

Q: Were you trained at all, or just thrown out there?

BURNS: Those were the days when, after the first assignment, new officers were assigned to what was called the “Foreign Service School.” But our class, the class of '41, was the first one that did not go to this school. War came in December, the school scheduled for 1942 was canceled and was never held again after the war.

Q: Your first post was where?

BURNS: Juarez, Mexico.

Q: What were you doing there?

BURNS: Well, there is an amusing story about my going there. We have a ranch in Texas which has always been in the family. Most of my family, which is a large family, are in the cattle business, and they ranch all the way out to El Paso. So all of them knew that Juarez was in those days just a little one street town with mostly bars and bordellos. I called home with the news of the assignment, my mother being on one phone and my sister on another. With thoughts of Paris, Rome, Vienna in their minds, they asked where I would be going, and when I said “Juarez” there was a very long pause and one of them inquired faintly, “Surely you don't mean that place across the river from El Paso.”

But to go back to your question, Juarez was the largest town on the border. In those days we had about 8 consulates at the border, Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Piedras Negras, Agua Prieta, Nogales, Mexicali, Tijuana and Juarez, Juarez being by some measure the largest. The Consulate was headed by a remarkable man named Bill Blocker who while I was there was named Supervising Consul General of the entire border. We had an immense amount of protection of American citizens work there as you can imagine. I didn't wait to be called to go to the police station. I went every morning to see how many Americans had been arrested during the preceding twenty-four hours. There were almost always several, not infrequently repeaters.

I would talk to them to make sure they had not been unfairly or unjustly arrested. And of course they never had been? If they needed help in arranging bail, I would get in touch with someone for them. There was a modest amount of commercial activity, not much. Public relations were probably of primary importance there on the border. Because, of course, there were large military establishments across the river in El Paso, Fort Bliss and Biggs Field. Naturally there was a lot of visa activity but it ran more or less mechanically and I was never involved to any extent in that work.

Q: What did the Consul General do? Did you observe his work at all?

BURNS: Mr. Blocker was a personal operator. He worked with people and he built up a remarkable feeling of congeniality on both sides of the border. He had an excellent relationship with the immigration and customs officials on both sides and the military as well. Politics in Mexico were not like politics in the United States and Mr. Blocker understood that very well. He persuaded a good friend of his, whose name was Antonio Bermudez, to run for mayor, to try to clean up the town. Mr. Bermudez was elected, and the day after the election he came into Mr. Blocker's office with a list of city employees to obtain his opinion of all of them, opinions which Mr. Blocker did not hesitate to express. During my 30 years in the Service I witnessed no individual, of whatever rank, who did so effectively what he needed to do as William P. Blocker. He took a great interest in the training of new officers, something of which the Department was well aware and of which it took advantage. Two or three of every new class were assigned to Juarez.

Q: Well how did it work? I'm an old consular hand myself. I mean with the police, if the police were arresting this many Americans you must have had very close relations with the police in Juarez.

BURNS: Mr. Blocker had been there quite a while. As a matter of fact it was his second time in Juarez and he was so well known, and so admired that that sort of ensured good relations, just because he was so popular. He could have run for mayor of Juarez himself!

I had been there perhaps a few months and while I cannot remember the details of this encounter at the police station I apparently took an aggressive stance with the desk sergeant one morning. When I returned to the Consulate I came through the back door and Mr. Blocker was on the telephone with the sergeant who had called to complain about me. Mr. Blocker had a booming voice and never realized that he could be heard in all the nearby offices and I could hear him say: “Yes, I told him to say that; of course he was speaking for me. Whatever he says he is speaking for me and don't be calling me any more to complain about anything he says,” all that in border Spanish, of course. Almost immediately there was a loud call, “John!” and I received a stern lecture, beginning with something like, “Who do you think you are when you go to the police station? etc. etc.” He never knew I had heard every word he had said to the sergeant and you may be sure that it was something I remembered throughout my years in the Foreign Service.

When I was transferred from Juarez to Belem, Mr. Blocker handed me a set of the Foreign Service regulations, saying, “Here's your copy of the regulations. Take these with you, study them carefully, and before making any decision be sure it is supported by the regulations and you'll be the poorest Foreign Service officer ever commissioned.”

Mr. Blocker had another favorite bit of counsel for new officers which was: “Don't ever forget Rule Seven!” Rule Seven, according to Mr. Blocker was, “Don't take yourself so seriously.” He didn't say what the other rules were, or who had propounded them, but all my life I have found Rule Seven a useful guide.

Q: You were there until about '43, was it? And then you went to Brazil. Where did you go in Brazil?

BURNS: Belem, at the mouth of the Amazon River.

Q: You were there for about a year and a half. What were you doing there?

BURNS: With the capture of Indonesia by the Japanese, there had been an almost complete termination of supplies of natural rubber to the allied powers. Great strides had been made in the development of synthetic rubber but there were still a number of important needs (one of them was airplane tires) for which synthetic rubber could not (then) be used. In an endeavor to increase the production of natural rubber in the Amazon Valley, the US created the Rubber Development Corporation (RDC) which, at its height, must have had one thousand or more American employees in Brazil, most of them in Belem and Manaus.

There was also a large US air base at Belem, a “Naval Observer” and a squadron of navy PBYs.

All of this made Belem a very busy place during the war years and there was a lot of every variety of consular work.

Q: Were the planes still flying down to Brazil and then across?

BURNS: Yes, there was a great deal of official and military travel through Belem. The Pan American flying boats, called “Clippers”, made regular stops on their flights between the US, North Africa and Portugal.

Q: How about protection and welfare? Was that a problem?

BURNS: Not really. Both the military and the RDC took care of their own personnel. The latter even had its own airline. Belem was a busy port and we had the normal amount of merchant shipping problems.

Q: You then moved to Rio, where you served about three years. One of the great men of the Foreign Service was Ambassador there, wasn't he, Jefferson Caffery?

BURNS: Ambassador Caffery left for Paris the same day that I arrived in Rio from Belem. During the years that I was there the Ambassadors were Adolf Berle and William D. Pawley.

Q: These were two political appointees of some caliber. How did you find them?

BURNS: I had been assigned to Rio as staff aide to Walter Donnelly, the Economic Counselor of Embassy, but he was, himself, transferred very shortly thereafter; before the arrival of Ambassador Berle, as a matter of fact. The latter asked me to serve as his staff aide and I had the same title, but quite a different job description, under Ambassador Pawley. I had a most congenial, and interesting, working relationship with both of them. They remained friends of mine as long as they lived.

Q: Could we talk just a little about Berle? What was his background?

BURNS: Well he had graduated from Harvard at age 16 for one thing and later from Harvard Law School, presumably before he was twenty although I am not certain about that. He was a prominent New York lawyer and came to Washington with President Franklin Roosevelt as one of the latter's so-called “brain trusters”, serving for a number of years as Assistant Secretary of State. Those were the days when the title Assistant Secretary of State really meant something. I have never encountered a mind like Mr. Berle's. It was awesome, to use a term recently overworked by adolescents, as was his flow of language. He could dictate a speech of considerable length and, after it was typed, never change a word. Fortunately he had a secretary, Louella Livengood, who could take dictation as fast as he could talk.

Q: From your position, how did he deal with the Brazilian government?

BURNS: To begin with Brazil felt complimented that such a prominent man, and one so close to President Roosevelt, would be sent there as Ambassador, as they were by the earnest, and surprisingly successful efforts both the Ambassador and Mrs. Berle made

to learn to speak Portuguese. Here I might parenthetically note that both of them were impatient with Foreign Service officers, and their wives, who made little or no effort to learn Portuguese. Their Portuguese teacher lunched with them every day and conversation was exclusively in that language. Other guests who could not speak Portuguese simply did not participate.

For a number of years Brazil had been under the dictatorial rule of Getulio Vargas. He had cooperated closely with the United States during the war, permitting the establishment of US air bases in northern Brazil and even sending a division of Brazilian troops to participate in the Italian campaign. At the conclusion of the war, Vargas, probably with a certain amount of US encouragement, had announced elections for a certain date. But as that date approached there was increasing evidence that he was preparing to cancel, or at least postpone, them. Ambassador Berle found occasion to make a speech, to an important group, in which he referred to the coming elections as having been guaranteed by “a man whose word the United States has always found to be good”. Rio newspapers the following morning banner headlined: “Sensacional Discurso do Embaixador Berle”; it rocked Brazil. It was not, of course, solely responsible but certainly played an influential role in Vargas' departure from the presidency soon thereafter. Mr. Berle also resigned not long afterward. He had never envisaged a lengthy tenure as Ambassador, in Brazil or anywhere else.

Q: I'm sure Berle knew exactly what he was doing.

BURNS: I am sure that there was never in Mr. Berle's life an occasion when he did not know exactly what he was doing, which does not mean that everyone else agreed with him. I was never sure how far up the line, he had informed Washington of what he intended to say; he would never have gone through any sort of “clearance” procedure. It all seemed crucially important at the time and it is curious how details have faded from my memory, when I have such a clear recollection of small things, such as some of the ones I mentioned about Juarez, and Bill Blocker.

Between the departure of Ambassador Berle and the arrival of Ambassador William D. Pawley, I was moved to be in charge of the Consular Division of the Embassy, work which I enjoyed very much. Although, for some reason, it has not enjoyed what might be termed the “cachet” of the political arena, it has always seemed to me to be probably the most worthwhile work of the Foreign Service.

Q: Fun too.

BURNS: Yes, that too. You do things that really matter to other individuals and I was very content running the Consular Section, which was in another building near the Chancery. Nevertheless, shortly after Ambassador Pawley's arrival he called me to his office and said that he wanted me to return and do the same work that I had done for Ambassador Berle. In doing so he compared himself rather unfavorably with Ambassador Berle and “his brilliant mind” in a manner which I interpreted as somewhat slighting to the latter. I said, “One thing you should know; I am a great admirer of Ambassador Berle” to which he replied that he would always respect that and that I would never hear from him any reference to Ambassador Berle to which I could take exception. And I never did. But the two held very different views toward Latin America and the US role in those countries.

Q: Could you talk about how a staff assistant is used by two different ambassadors?

BURNS: Well, for Ambassador Berle I was just a staff aide, making appointments, keeping his calendar, doing personal errands, that sort of thing. Being unmarried I got around Rio quite a lot and he used to say he liked to use me as a “sounding board”. He always encouraged everyone to say just what they thought and he enjoyed discussions of almost any subject, with almost anybody. Being around Adolf Berle was a constant mental stimulation.

My work for Ambassador Pawley was entirely different. I was a personal assistant rather than a staff aide and wrote almost everything he signed. I also had a much grander office,

not the small one immediately adjoining his that I had occupied during Ambassador Berle's tenure. Every morning I would be at Ambassador Pawley's desk as he went through his mail—most of which I would previously have opened—and he would hand me papers, saying, “Tell this person this, or that”, but mostly just, “Answer this.” No one did that sort of thing for Adolf Berle. But don't infer that I did not develop great personal fondness for Ambassador Pawley. I liked him immensely.

Q: Could you talk a little about his background?

BURNS: It was quite a glamorous one. He had made a great deal of money building airplanes, at a factory he owned in Bangalore, India and he had, in fact, been one of the organizers of The Flying Tigers, along with General Chennault and others. He brought along to Rio several personal limousines and his own airplane and crew. His was a very grand Embassy and he entertained lavishly. While he made no effort to learn Portuguese, he spoke Spanish fairly fluently and, as you know, Portuguese speakers can understand Spanish although that does not seem to work the other way around. He was popular with the government and with everyone else, a very likeable individual; and exceedingly generous.

He greatly enjoyed entertaining prominent visitors and we had a heady run of them: General Eisenhower, General Mark Clark, under whose command the Brazilian division had served in Italy, Henry Luce, the publisher of Time-Life and a personal friend of Ambassador Pawley and any number of others, finally culminating in the Rio conference for the Inter-American defense agreement, which brought the battleship Missouri, President and Mrs. Truman and daughter Margaret, Secretary of State Marshall, Senators Connally and Vandenberg and any number of others of the “top brass” of Washington to Rio. Also along, naturally, were a regiment of the “media”, among whom was the well-known radio news commentator, Eric Sevareid. Actually the Rio conference produced little in the way of news and Sevareid, who had been in and out of the office a good deal, called down one day from Petropolis, the small town in the hills above Rio where the conference

was being held, saying, “There's not a thing going on up here, how about my coming down and staying with you at your house on Ipanema Beach?”, which he did. He had been, of course, the CBS correspondent in Paris before we entered the war and the long talks I had with him about his experiences were the most memorable part of the Rio conference for me.

Q: What was the political situation in Brazil during this period? Vargas was more or less toppled?

BURNS: Yes, at least he left office. And that, forty years later, I cannot recall the details of the circumstances under which he left might be an indication of the lasting importance of events which, at the time, are regarded as vitally important. It seems too that General Dutra, Chief of Staff of the Brazilian Army, became acting head of government. At any rate, elections were held in which General Dutra was the successful candidate.

Q: How did Pawley relate to military government?

BURNS: He got along just fine.

Q: He had no particular ideological...

BURNS: His ideological bent was strongly conservative, even though he was appointed by President Truman. He subsequently became quite close to Eisenhower and was a great supporter of the Eisenhower administration.

Q: How did we look upon events in Argentina, with Peron?

BURNS: There was a fundamental debate in the US on the question of the extent to which we should work with whatever government might come to power in other countries, especially those in this hemisphere, or try to influence, by whatever means, the formation —or removal—of those governments. It was not a new debate. It had been—I might say has been—with us ever since the Spanish-American war. Ambassador Pawley advocated

non-interference, as did Ambassador Messersmith in Argentina, and, thus, finding a working relationship with Peron. Ambassador Berle, of course, had been of the opposite persuasion.

Q: Do you think this was just fortuitous or was the feeling that these changed ambassadors were there for a reason?

BURNS: I don't really know what was going on in Washington. President Roosevelt, although he had announced the so-called Good Neighbor policy, was not really interested in Latin America, nor, really, was President Truman. It has always been regarded by Washington as a sort of side show, and Latin Americans know it. Truman had made the changes in Ambassadors, sending Pawley to Brazil and Messersmith to Argentina. Messersmith's predecessor, Spruille Braden, had been outspokenly anti-Peron.

Q: I heard there were mobs in Argentina shouting "Braden No, Peron Si".

BURNS: I have no doubt that that was true. Incidentally, during the Rio conference, when all the brass were assembled, Eva Peron stopped by on her return from her much-publicized trip to Europe, went to the conference and sashayed around a bit. Certainly she attracted a lot of attention but nothing more.

Q: Were you there the whole time Pawley was there?

BURNS: We left about the same time. He was away a lot and I believe went back for his formal farewell after I had left for the US

Q: What was your impression of the Embassy in Rio, the staff and all?

BURNS: From the day of my arrival I was conscious, and increasingly admiring, of the role played at the Embassy by a group of women, all US citizens, who were permanent residents of Rio, some of them holding dual nationality by virtue of having been born there. They were all happily married, with families, and to call them, as a group, the cornerstone

of the Embassy would be to understate their importance. They were all completely bilingual in Portuguese, widely acquainted throughout the Brazilian government and knew exactly whom to call on for whatever purpose. Five of them stand out in my memory: Lucy Faber, who had been secretary to Ambassador Caffery and who became secretary to the Deputy Chief of Mission when Ambassador Berle brought his own stenographer with him; Anne Martin, who took over the non-stenographic work for Berle (of which there was a great deal as he was an “activist” Ambassador); Susan Barbosa, who essentially “ran” the consular section even not nominally in charge (as I was for a few months); Edith Cole, secretary to the Economic Counselor and Roxie LeCoufle, secretary to the administrative officer. The importance of the role that these women played became increasingly evident, to the Embassy if not to the Department, as they were “encouraged out” by new personnel policies which reduced their salaries and allowances. They were replaced by nice American girls, sent from the US, who could take dictation and type but who were otherwise helpless in Rio. They neither spoke a word of Portuguese nor tried to learn and they had to rely upon the above-mentioned five, and the local staff, for assistance in all aspects of their personal life: housing, shopping etc. The same had been true at Juarez, where the bilingual assistance of the resident American staff had been the most important single element in the effective operation of the office. It was an opinion which I expressed at the time—as forcefully, that is, as an officer of my low rank could—and it is one that I never changed. To restate it here is one of the reasons that I welcomed this interview. Obviously there are many areas of the world where resident Americans are not available for clerical employment, but there are many—notably Latin America and Europe, and increasingly, I suspect, in the Orient—where there are, and not to find ways to integrate them into the staffing patterns has been, and is, to deprive the Foreign Service of what could be a uniquely valuable asset. However, to voice such an opinion is, I recognize, to be shouting into the bureaucratic wind.

Q: It's supposedly in the name of security, but it's been silly. I've had both local employees and Americans as my secretaries and there's no doubt in my mind that you are three or

four times better if you have somebody who is either native to the place, who had been doing it for a while, or who is a dual national. They know the territory, they understand the sensitivities, and all that, which the Americans don't; and they're a lot of trouble to maintain.

BURNS: Paranoid attitudes toward security have been responsible for a number of mistaken personnel policies.

Q: We're leaving you at 1947 when you went back to Washington for a while, but I would like to jump ahead just to make sure we cover this period and then come back, if you don't mind. So let's go to 1961. You had been in Bonn as Political Counselor and then you received your first ambassadorial assignment. Could you tell me how that came about?

BURNS: It came right out of the blue, and it was very unwelcome news.

Q: I might mention that John Burns was my first boss as Consul General when I was a bright and eager young vice consul in Frankfurt in 1955.

BURNS: That it was such unwelcome news was not because I did not want to go to Africa but that I did not want to leave Germany. Actually when I had been assigned as Consul General at Frankfurt in 1955, I had objected on the grounds that I spoke no German at all. I was coming out of the War College, before which I had served two years as an Inspector. One of the posts I had inspected had been Helsinki and I had developed deep admiration for Finland and for the Finnish people. As it happened, the DCM job at Helsinki became vacant the summer of 1955 and when the personnel officers came out to Ft. McNair to talk to the graduating class about onward assignments, I held up my hand for that post. I did not, of course, speak Finnish but there were almost no officers of that rank who did. And I had a detailed knowledge of the work and the problems of that Embassy. A fellow graduate of the War College that year, Francis Cummingham, spoke fluent German and I suggested that he go to Frankfurt and I to Helsinki. I might have saved my breath; Francis went to Helsinki and I to Frankfurt. I might parenthetically note that throughout the

thirty years that I spent in the Foreign Service I was continually baffled by the secondary importance that so many officers—especially personnel officers—attached to language competence which has always to me been not important but essential. Nevertheless, as it turned out I look back on Frankfurt as one of my top tours of duty—if not the top—from the standpoint of personal enjoyment and satisfaction. So much so that during the next three years—which I spent in the Department after only eighteen months at Frankfurt—other than meeting the demands of my two assignments returning to Germany became my sole objective. And in 1960 I went to Bonn, at my request, as deputy to Bill Tyler, the Political Counselor, hoping to succeed him if my work there justified that. Whether it did or not I did succeed Bill and had been Political Counselor less than a year when I was appointed Ambassador to the Central African Republic. The Berlin Wall had just been built, the Adenauer government had been forced into one of coalition and Germany was, at least to me, the most fascinating place in the world. And—not without a lot of effort I might say—I had finally become fairly proficient in the use of German whereas the remains of my French had become rusty to the point of uselessness. All of which might explain, if not excuse, the ill grace with which I moved from Bonn to Bangui. Nevertheless, the longer I was at Bangui the more I enjoyed it, something I can say, as a matter of fact, about every Foreign Service assignment I had except those in the Department of State.

Q: You were there from 1961-'63 as Ambassador. This was early 1960s, Kennedy administration was just in, Africa was just opening up as an area which hadn't happened...

(change of room due to noise)

Did you have any experience in Africa prior to this?

BURNS: No, not even during my inspection years. I had never been in Africa.

Q: Were you the first Ambassador?

BURNS: Actually Wendell Blancki had been named Ambassador to the four countries that had previously comprised French Equatorial Africa, which were the French Congo, Gabon, Chad and the Central African Republic. But he had resided in Brazzaville and only visited Bangui, which is the CAR capital. The other three posts had been filled. Arch Calhoun went to Chad, shortly before I was appointed to the CAR, and a political appointee, Charles Darlington, had gone to Gabon. Wendell Blancki was at Brazzaville, the French Congo.

Q: It's sort of interesting that they turned to the European hands, the people with more European experience at the time, to fill a number of the posts.

BURNS: I don't know what brought about the choices that were made. A number of my contemporaries were going to these new posts in Africa and it was perfectly appropriate, I suppose. There were not that many old African hands around and they had to find someone. These are not the sort of posts that are likely to appeal to political appointees, at least not the kind that make major contributions to campaigns. I guess the fact that I didn't have a family helped qualify me for a post like Bangui, which is certainly not much of a family post. To tell the truth, I greatly enjoyed service at small posts, out of the daily news etc. One feels a much greater sense of independence and individuality. There is much more of a personal “challenge”.

Q: Before you went out were there any confirmation problems?

BURNS: No. Few people even knew where it was; or cared.

Q: Did you go to Washington first to find out what the...

BURNS: Yes, I came back to Washington for consultation in the Department and there were brief hearings on the Hill; so brief that I have hardly any recollection of them.

Q: What was your impression of AF, the African Bureau?

BURNS: We had a very energetic Assistant Secretary in G. Mennen Williams. Actually President Kennedy appointed him Assistant Secretary before he chose Dean Rusk to be Secretary, if you recall. This tended to make Williams more of an individual operator than most Assistant Secretaries. He came to Bangui while I was there, a stop on a big tour. I believe that while Assistant Secretary he visited every country in Africa.

Q: Well, what were you told when you went out to Bangui?

BURNS: Almost nothing. We had very few interests there, none really that could not have been easily handled by a small consular establishment. There were a number of American missionaries around, as there are in most African countries, but there were no other American residents. The CAR had a small diamond production, which attracted the attention of some American buyers but our commercial interests were almost zero. We were continually receiving instructions to lobby the CAR about votes in the UN, which the local authorities found an irritating bore as, I must admit, did I. We finally reached an agreement for the establishment of a small AID mission, something which it seemed to me we wanted more than the CAR did. Without ever being so instructed, or without it being mentioned, one might say, “in so many words”, I felt that there were elements in the US government which wished to see an increased “role” for the United States in Africa, just for the sake of playing such a role, with a necessarily consequent slight—or even more than slight—diminution in those of France and Britain. This was not a point of view with which I ever had any sympathy, always feeling that close cooperation with our European allies, but in a secondary role, in working with African problems was better for everyone concerned, most especially the Africans. This was not “in step” with much of the prevailing thought in Washington.

Q: I think there's always, in any country, the United States in particular, especially during the Kennedy time, a feeling that the European powers are, it's our generation to take over...

BURNS: I think you are noting the very thing that I felt. Not, as I have said, there was any specific statement to that effect but there are other ways of communicating.

Q: But did you have any, sort of, go out there and settle this problem, or that problem?

BURNS: No, it was largely just administration, getting the new Embassy started, establishing a presence etc. I was interested in the Peace Corps—very interested—and became even more so later, in Tanzania. I thought that there might be a real place for volunteers in the CAR and the then President of the CAR, David Dacko, was eager to obtain them. I had a long, and very sympathetic, hearing from Sargent Shriver on the subject but those were the early days of the Peace Corps and it was so heavily committed in so many places that the CAR was far down the list. Subsequently, after I had departed, there was a Peace Corps program in the CAR.

Q: Describe a bit about the situation on the ground in Bangui, what the American Embassy consisted of, and how you worked there?

BURNS: We had a very small staff but all we needed. Our offices were on the first floor of a downtown office building, with the USIA library and program rooms above. Housing was very modest, but entirely adequate. A new residence was being built while I was there but I never lived in it. About the only purpose that I can see in maintaining these establishments, and having the individual in charge called Ambassador, is the feeling of distinction drawn therefrom by the host government. The actual importance of the work is minimal, as you know.

Q: What was the role of the French?

BURNS: It could be called paramount. The country was almost totally reliant financially upon France. That was thirty years ago but I would be surprised were the same not true today. The CAR had been independent only a few years and in every government ministry there was a French official, usually a veteran of colonial administrations. The

French had what I might term an avuncular attitude toward their former colonies and they, in turn, enjoyed wide esteem and affection. Their approach to African colonization was quite different from that of the British. They were even indulgent toward the infamous Colonel Bokassa, who, while I was there, was head of the CAR army. Actually I found him a congenial enough sort of a man, as years earlier I had found the equally—or more—infamous Dr. Duvalier, in Haiti. Perhaps I am not a good judge of character—although I did not know either of them well—but they developed their horror personalities after the time I spent in their respective countries.

Q: When you were there, from '61 to '63, was there any sort of spillover from the Congo? The great crises?

BURNS: Not a great deal.

Q: How about the Soviets? Because at that time we were very worried about the Soviet menace in Africa. Were you spending a great deal of time looking for Soviets under rocks?

BURNS: Not very much. Not any in fact.

Q: What about an aid program? What were we doing?

BURNS: We had a very modest aid program, one which Washington seemed almost more interested in establishing than did Bangui. It was so modest that aside from a police training program I can't remember what it included. Hammering out administrative details was the principal problem in closing the agreement. In some instances we asked for privileges which were not even extended to the French.

Q: What about the United Nations votes?

BURNS: As I have already mentioned, that was something with which we were constantly belabored. I imagine that at least half of my calls on the Foreign Minister, probably more than half, were to solicit CAR votes for or against something in the United Nations,

something about which they knew nothing and cared less. To be constantly coaching them in this area—something the French never did nor did other Embassies in Bangui—was an annoyance to them and troublesome on the whole. I came to feel pretty strongly about this, and later even more so in Tanzania where, in Julius Nyerere, the country had a highly intelligent and cultivated President. It became embarrassing continually to be approaching this man on subjects of little interest to anyone. It was an illustration of the observation of then Secretary Dean Rusk, that we conducted “stadium diplomacy, where everyone either wins or loses every day”. I think our UN hand was far overplayed in those days.

Q: I take it there were no major events while you were there.

BURNS: No.

Q: I take it you left with, shall we say, enthusiasm.

BURNS: Curiously enough, the longer I was there the fonder I became of it. I left short of two years and I would have been very pleased to stay longer. I didn't seek the next assignment.

Q: How did you find the people there, as a people?

BURNS: They were very simple people, with extremely limited education, even among government officials. They continued, as I have noted, to rely heavily upon the French in most every area. Altogether pleasant and agreeable, they had few common interests with Europeans or Americans.

Q: Well, you left there and went to Paris from '63 to '65. What were you doing in Paris?

BURNS: I was the so-called “political aide” to the Supreme Commander, Allied Powers Europe, then General Lyman L. Lemnitzer. Although I was listed as a member of the Embassy staff, my office was at SHAPE headquarters, several miles south of Paris. The Ambassador to NATO, Thomas Finletter, thought that my position should be attached

to his Embassy rather than to that of the French government and there may have been some justification for that; not that it really mattered. My “boss” was General Lemnitzer but I enjoyed also being on the staff of Ambassador Bohlen because he was an old friend. I also occupied Embassy living quarters in Paris and was provided an Embassy car and driver.

Q: What did your job consist of?

BURNS: There was an immense amount of cable traffic, incoming that is, from all the NATO capitals. I would sift through that every morning and shortly thereafter see General Lemnitzer, reporting whatever I thought might be of interest to him or important to the military operations of the alliance. I attended his staff meetings and worked closely with his Chief of Staff, General Parker, and his personal aide, General Orwat, with whatever questions a day might bring. It was not a position for which it was easy to write a job description. I followed Walter Stoessel, who was a highly attuned European political officer, which I was not. I frequently seemed to be turning up in jobs for which I felt totally unqualified: Consul General at Frankfurt, Ambassador to the CAR, and this one at SHAPE.

Q: Well, this is what Foreign Service officers do!

BURNS: Yes, adapt.

Q: How did General Lemnitzer use you?

BURNS: I would occasionally write a telegram for him and, as I noted, I worked very closely with his immediate staff, which included his speech writer. There was a collegial atmosphere around General Lemnitzer's office and he was a very engaging individual with a great sense of humor. I think he enjoyed having me around because I did not fit the military mold. I would dare laugh out loud in staff meetings, which no one else would except General Lemnitzer himself. He would! And often. I really enjoyed working for

General Lemnitzer. He ranks in my mind with Consul General Blocker for doing, in my opinion, his particular job as nearly perfectly as it would be possible for one to do.

Q: How did the Americans on the staff at NATO look on Greece and Turkey as far as an instrument of NATO?

BURNS: That had ceased to be a topic of discussion before I got there. They had by that time been long in NATO. General Lemnitzer showed a great deal of interest in that wing of the alliance.

Q: How about de Gaulle and NATO at that time?

BURNS: You have touched on something that was of special interest to me. De Gaulle was, of course, jealous of, and actively opposed to, the essentially dominant influence of the United States in Europe and especially in the NATO alliance. He withdrew French military forces from NATO and I began to think a lot about, and study, the idea of moving SHAPE headquarters out of France, before we were told, in so many words, to do so. After a lot of thought I presented the idea to General Lemnitzer and it won his immediate interest as it did that of the US Ambassador to France, Charles Bohlen. But Ambassador to NATO, Thomas Finletter, and his deputy Elbridge Durbrow, were anything but interested and the chief of staff at NATO, General Parker was also opposed. They would not even discuss the subject and consequently it died as neither General Lemnitzer nor Ambassador Bohlen was going to carry any flags for the idea however much it may have interested them. Of course, a year or so later the headquarters were moved to Belgium, whether at the direct request of the French or not I do not recall. It interested me a great deal at the time but thirty years later it seems of no importance whatever, which, I might add, is true of many things. Mr. Blocker's “Rule 7” might be amended to read, “Don't take things (rather than yourself) too seriously”.

Q: What was your impression of how Ambassador Bohlen worked?

BURNS: I was not closely enough involved with the work of the Embassy to qualify me to express an opinion. Plus the fact that the Ambassador was a personal friend, and I such an admirer of his, that I would be prejudiced in anything I might say about Ambassador Bohlen.

Q: Well, what was Lemnitzer's view of de Gaulle at that time?

BURNS: I would just term it completely correct. He recognized de Gaulle's lack of real support for NATO, and regretted it. But he accepted it as one of the circumstances with which he had to work. He never expressed personal opinions about political leaders, or questions, of member countries of NATO although his political perceptions were what I would term “razor sharp”. He saw de Gaulle from time to time and de Gaulle respected him, decorating him at the time of his retirement.

Q: How did we view the Soviet threat at the time you were there?

BURNS: It was central to everything we thought and did. Almost every aspect of US foreign operations was governed by what was perceived as the Soviet threat. Nevertheless, there were quite a number then who viewed it as having perhaps a disproportionate influence.

Q: Was Berlin...

BURNS: A constant sore, constant. Some sort of crisis was continually arising, usually provoked by some action of the Soviet Union. But certainly the West, and especially the US, was not hard to provoke.

Q: Did you get involved, from your aspect as political adviser to the military commander, on how to play the Berlin situation?

BURNS: No, we didn't use the word “adviser”. I was the political assistant. And I might say General Lemnitzer didn't need any advice in the political field. He had excellent political antennae and was an extremely sensitive thinker. I often said, “General Lemnitzer needs a political adviser like General Eisenhower needs a military adviser”. And in whatever case, in every Berlin crisis, by the time everyone who felt he had a right to express an opinion had done so the result resembled the finale of “Oklahoma”.

Q: At this particular point, what about the Germans? Were there any problems? I'm talking about the West Germans.

BURNS: None whatever. On the contrary they were the most responsive and cooperative of any representatives at SHAPE.

Q: What about the British?

BURNS: Equally so. The only stresses at SHAPE were provided by the French.

Q: Did you get involved in nuclear issues?

BURNS: Not to any extent. The principal question which comes to mind was of France's development of its “force de frappe”, which meant, of course, a nuclear capability.

Q: At that time was it sort of the feeling, “Well, we've got military parity and stability and it's probably unlikely that there will be a war?” Or what was the attitude?

BURNS: After the Cuban crisis there had been what might be termed a certain lessening of tension. But Berlin continued explosive, and capable of precipitating a serious crisis at any time. As far as European politics affected the work of SHAPE, Berlin was the leading question.

Q: Well, then you left SHAPE in 1965. Had you been there during the Cuban missile crisis?

BURNS: No.

Q: Was there any aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis?

BURNS: General Lemnitzer had been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time of the Cuban missile crisis but I have no recollection of hearing him talk about it. Nor had it any influence of which I was aware on any of the planning or activities of SHAPE.

Q: How did your appointment to Tanzania come about?

BURNS: I was very surprised by that, but highly pleased. Assistant Secretary Williams still held that position. We had been friendly and I had got along fine with him but never thought that I was among his favorite chiefs of mission in Africa. While in Bangui, as I have mentioned, it was my opinion that we should cooperate with the French more than authorities in the Department wished and therefore, after leaving, I thought that the likelihood of my returning to Africa was slight. Here is an incident that might be amusing. About a month before receiving word of my appointment to Tanzania, I was lunching with three Foreign Service colleagues, and contemporaries, in Paris and we all stated the missions we would most like to be chosen to head; missions, that is, within the range of reasonable expectation, and I had stated, first—as was always true—Finland and then Tanzania and Nepal. The day after the announcement that I would be going to Tanzania, one of the friends with whom I had lunched telephoned and inquired what magic man I had been working with as he would like to employ him. As I said, I was surprised but could not have been more delighted.

Q: Why did you want to go to Tanzania?

BURNS: It was a very interesting time in East Africa. Tanzania had been independent only a few years and had recently experienced the much publicized revolution in Zanzibar—from which emerged the name Tanzania following the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The country had a President, the remarkable Julius Nyerere, unique—then and ever since—in Africa. The time in the CAR had stimulated in me a real interest in Africa; and then, from a personal point of view, I loved that out of doors life and Tanzania offered the best, Mt. Kilimanjaro, the Serengeti, the Selous and all. It is not that I am a hunter but I am a dedicated camper, animal watcher and all that.

Q: You went out there from '65 to '69. Again, was there any problem with confirmation or anything like that?

BURNS: No, but there was one funny story about that though. At least it was funny as it turned out, it might have been different. When I arrived back in Washington, for consultation in the Department and confirmation hearings at the Senate, I was shown what I thought was a draft of the curriculum vitae that was to be sent to the Foreign Relations Committee. One of the items on it was Clubs: Washington - University and Metropolitan. I said that I saw no reason for that sort of thing to appear on a c.v. and that I would like it deleted. What they did not tell me was that a copy had already been sent to the committee. During the hearing, Chairman Fulbright, holding two pieces of paper in his hands, said, “I have two curricula vitae for you Mr. Burns. They are identical with one interesting exception. One of them lists you as a member of the Metropolitan Club (he didn't mention the University) and on the other that does not appear?” I responded that I had had it deleted from what I had thought was a draft, which I would not have bothered to do had I known a copy had already been sent the committee. He asked why I had had it deleted and I replied that I thought it was irrelevant. He made one or two acidulous remarks but asked nothing I termed of real significance. In those days the Metropolitan Club had no black members—Robert Kennedy had, in fact, resigned in protest against that policy—and I had visions of one of the reporters assigned to the Hill, picking that up and

my seeing in the Post the next day a lead line reading, “Member of all-white club chosen as Ambassador to Tanzania”. But fortunately it didn't happen.

Q: I might just add that we are doing this interview at the Metropolitan Club right now.

BURNS: I was never in favor of segregation and favored the removal of all arbitrary barriers to membership in the Metropolitan Club. But I don't mount campaigns on personal issues like that. A lot of my friends belonged here, it has always been a good place to eat lunch and I joined years ago. Things like that work their way quietly to resolution, if left to do so, and this one did. There are no barriers now and everyone—I suppose—is happy about things. I was interested that after leaving the Senate, Senator Fulbright joined the Metropolitan Club, when he did not have to face the Arkansas electorate.

Q: When you went out to Tanzania did you have any sort of brief? What were American interests and what were you doing?

BURNS: Here I will say something that I have never recorded before. But that does not matter as no one would be interested this many years later. It harks back, perhaps, to Bill Blocker's telling me that if I followed the Foreign Service Regulations to the letter I would be a poor officer. Maybe I harked back to that counsel more often than I should have during my Service years but if so I have no regrets.

Tanzania placed a limit on the number of its own nationals each Embassy could have accredited. It was 14 or 15, as I recall, and applied to every country except the United Kingdom, which had, of course, many British citizens seconded at various functions throughout the Tanzanian government. During the briefings in Washington, before leaving for Dar es Salaam, both the CIA and the Department of Defense made it very clear to me that increasing the number of their personnel there (CIA) and opening an attach#'s office (Defense), were, in their own words, “their top priorities in Africa”. I assured them that I would do my best but my fingers were mentally crossed. The Department never gave me actual specific instructions to present formal arguments for the removal of the

American personnel limitation but it was clear that that was favored by most everyone. I look on my three and one half years as what I might term the most “singing” assignment of my entire career. And that was directly attributable to there being such a small staff. We had one officer for each function: one political officer, one economic, one administrative, one consular (who also worked for CIA, as did the code clerk). No one had to look for anything to do and we had little time for things like staff meetings; we'd have one every two weeks or so. I have always thought meetings, generally, a terrible waste of time. I have also always thought that the more time officers spend out of the office the better and the staff at Dar, especially the Swahili speakers, did a lot of traveling around the country, as I did myself. We had an old 4-wheel drive Land Rover and it was on the road most of the time. Not only did this add to the substance—and I might say validity—of our reporting, it was a practice extremely well received by the Tanzanian government. Because of our mandatorily limited staff, the Department was careful to send out the best qualified individuals. For instance Tom Pickering was DCM, followed by Jack Matlock.

Q: Both Ambassadors to the Soviet Union later on.

BURNS: Yes. George Roberts was a witty, brilliant political officer and Earl Belinger the quietest, most efficient administrative officer I ever had the pleasure to work with. Roberts spoke fluent Swahili as did Pickering and Matlock. President Nyerere once said to me, “Your Mr. Pickering speaks better Swahili than half the members of my parliament”, which was true. The result of all that was an operation of which I was immensely proud and, as I have noted, the most satisfying assignment of my entire career. Before leaving I had a long, sort of retrospective, conversation with President Nyerere, sitting on the terrace of Government House, just harking back, with many laughs (President Nyerere had a fine sense of humor) over events of the three and one half years. Just before leaving I said to him, “Mr. President, there is one thing I'd like to say. As long as I have been here I have been urged by my government to try to persuade you to raise, or remove, the limitation on the number of Americans who can be assigned to this Embassy. As you know, I have never mentioned the subject to you and if I can bespeak anything in behalf

of my successor, whoever that might be, it is that you never raise it." Laughing, he said, "Of course I won't. What country could have an interest in little Tanzania to justify the diplomatic presence here of more than fifteen persons?" And, of course, he was exactly right. I recall a book written by Ambassador Ellis O. Briggs, who held, I believe, seven different missions, in which he said that the most efficient, and effective, of all seven had been Prague because the Czech government limited the number of Americans who could be stationed there. Were I asked what single action would most improve everything about the Foreign Service I would without hesitation say, "Reduce all staffs by a minimum of 25%." Of course the chance of anything like that happening, or even winning measurable support, is about the same as that of Death Valley experiencing a snowstorm.

Q: Well, could we talk about, during the '65 to '69 period that you were there what the situation was in Tanzania?

BURNS: There were no real political problems. Nyerere had essentially no political opposition. When, years later, he finally left the presidency he did so entirely voluntarily. His problems were economic. Tanzania is a miserably poor country, with no basis for hope of much change in the situation. Nyerere, realizing that, consistently worked to lower public expectations—which naturally soared after independence—or even hope of rapid economic advancement and stressed, rather, the importance of work and efforts to improve agricultural production and housing, simple advancements in living standards. Although he attracted an immense amount of foreign aid, there was something about the idea of aid that was alien to him and he was anything but a petitioner. He, himself, lived very simply and he insisted that members of his government do likewise. There were no Mercedes limousines assigned to his ministers—or to himself. He resided in his own house, not a Government House, the old British palace, and it was by no means as grand as the average embassy residence. He not only established diplomatic relations with communist China but paid a visit there. This agitated Washington tremendously, much more so than it did the British, Tanzania's erstwhile "principal". I was frequently instructed to protest this or that action of Tanzania, which Washington found insufficiently "pro-West"

and, of course, there was the constant run of pressure about Tanzanian votes in the UN. I found this difficult when dealing with a man as innately sophisticated as Nyerere. Once he laughingly said to me, “Mr. Ambassador, we can't let our friends choose our enemies for us.” He never showed the slightest resentment when, to tell the truth, he often had reason to do so.

Q: What was your impression of Nyerere during this period?

BURNS: I have rarely known anyone more dedicated to what he saw as his purpose in life. I once said that the song “The Impossible Dream” could have been written for him. He was a remarkably educated and cultured man, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh. One of his hobbies was translating Shakespeare into Swahili and one or two of them — Julius Caesar was one—were performed at the University of Dar es Salaam, an institution in which Nyerere, not surprisingly, took great interest. His problems were, as I have said, economic and they were beyond his solution. I wonder if they, and the economic problems of Africa as a whole, do not defy solution. It was frustrating to try to bring Washington to understand Nyerere. The first African chief of state invited to Washington by the Johnson administration was Colonel Mobutu of Zaire, who cooperated—one might almost say slavishly—with the United States in return for which he received untold millions in military and economic “aid”. He is today one of the world's wealthiest men. Incidentally, the week before he arrived in Washington on a state visit, he publicly executed several of his political opponents. We could never even arrange to have Nyerere received on a personal call at the White House, when he went to the United States to address, at their invitation, the Council on Foreign Relations. This was all because he had established diplomatic relations with communist China.

Q: Did you find that he was open to you when you came there?

BURNS: Completely. Originally I had feared that he might be tempted to refuse agr#ment to one coming direct from the office of the Supreme Commander Allied Powers Europe,

and that at least that might inhibit our relationship. Not at all. He is a much bigger man than that. And, as I have noted, he was blessed with a most engaging sense of humor.

Q: Was he going through the, I don't know what the term was, but it was the creation of all those small village communes. I heard some remarks to the effect that this really broke up what was a viable agricultural system and did not help.

BURNS: I don't believe that would be a fair contention in that, in my opinion, there was not a viable agricultural system to begin with. The country had not altogether emerged —if that is the proper word—from tribalism and the program called “Ujamaa”, a sort of communal village scheme, was something of an expansion of the tribal arrangement based on an organized plan. I don't know how it turned out but I never believed it would work, anymore than planned economies have ever worked in any country. I don't think our own governmental farm programs really “work”, however much they may benefit certain segments of our agricultural economy.

Q: This brings up an interesting situation. Nyerere was being accused of being too much of a devotee of the British Fabian Socialists and...

BURNS: I have never known how Fabian socialism differs from plain socialism. I do know that Nyerere believed in socialism for Tanzania, a country with no capital foundation, other than land and that not very productive. I believe that he thought that the introduction of large amounts of foreign capital into Tanzania would be simply a reversion to another form of colonialism. His idea was to discourage great economic expectation among his people while endeavoring to raise the simple standards of their day to day lives, through work and education. For instance, during the years that I was in Tanzania there was no television; none at all. It was Nyerere's view that 1) they could not afford television in the first place, 2) it would keep people from the work they should be doing and 3) it would promote discontent by acquainting the mass of Tanzanians with a way of life they could not hope to equal, at least not any time soon. As I said, Nyerere had an “impossible dream”. One

interesting sidelight of the no television situation was that almost every officer of the Embassy requested an extension of duty at that so-called “hardship post”. They all had several children of school age—one had seven—and they found a life with no television to have many advantages; not to say that that was the only consideration affecting their desire for longer duty. There were many agreeable features about life in Dar es Salaam.

Q: Were you able to contribute anything to the educational thing through exchanges or...

BURNS: Not to any great degree, no. We couldn't attract much attention from Washington for Nyerere. He was regarded by certain influential circles of the Johnson administration as a dangerous thinker. Despite the best efforts of Bill Leonhart, my predecessor, myself and Tony Ross, my successor, we could never persuade any of that particular group otherwise.

Q: You were there during some of the major periods of the civil rights movement in the United States. How did that play or not play, or was it...

BURNS: It was of course of a certain amount of interest, mostly limited to university circles, journalists, etc. Nyerere, who, as I have said, was a sophisticated thinker, was very—but quietly—interested. He was deeply disturbed by Robert Kennedy's assassination. Kennedy had visited Tanzania about a year earlier, a visit which even anti-American elements of the Tanzanian press called “a triumph”. Nyerere was deeply pleased by Kennedy's coming to Tanzania (it was Kennedy's own proposal) after his trip to South Africa and grieved—and I might say embittered—by his murder.

Q: Kennedy was assassinated about June of 1968, I believe.

BURNS: Around that time. A few months later Robert Kennedy, Jr. came out to East Africa with Lemoyne Billings, who had been probably John Kennedy's closest friend, and stayed a few days with me at Dar es Salaam. Nyerere was very gracious to him, receiving him in

his office, talking seriously with him about wildlife preservation etc. and posing for pictures with him. Of course Nyerere was a gracious man by nature.

Q: Did you deal with Robert Kennedy when he came? How did that go?

BURNS: It went as perfectly as anything like that can go. He and Mrs. Kennedy, as well as others accompanying him, stayed with me and of all the official visits with which I was involved over thirty years—and there were many—none equaled this one for its positive effect so far as US interests were concerned. Senator and Mrs. Kennedy charmed everyone and displayed sincere interest in everyone they met and everything they saw.

Q: Well, was there any problems...was Zanzibar pretty well in Tanzania at that time?

BURNS: Zanzibar was legally a part of Tanzania but day to day governmental operations and politics were handled exclusively by a group headed by Sheik Karume, on Zanzibar. Karume held the title of First Vice President of Tanzania but his role on the mainland (where I do not recall his appearing while I was there) was essentially non-existent, as was Nyerere's on the island. Nyerere early made it clear, in so many words, that he did not want the Embassy bothering his administration about questions concerning Zanzibar. It might be interesting to note that three successive Consuls at Zanzibar were Frank Carlucci, who later became Secretary of Defense, Tom Pickering, who went on to six subsequent embassies including the UN and Russia, and Jack Matlock, who also held several embassies, including the Soviet Union. So Zanzibar, a post which was later closed, helped spawn three highly successful careers. Zanzibar was regarded by Washington as a fermenting problem when Tom Pickering arrived. Carlucci had been “PNGed” not long before. Within a short time Zanzibar disappeared from the “pending problems” lists in Washington offices and from the agenda of “meetings”. I don't know how familiar you are with Tom Pickering's career but that has happened wherever he has gone. For instance when he was moved from Nigeria to El Salvador—with Secretary Shultz saying, “We are sending our best”, the “media” was reporting explosive stories on

a daily basis from that country. Within a month El Salvador had disappeared from the US headlines, or even the front pages. For some reason or other this has happened wherever Pickering has gone. Some officers have a talent—if not actually the intention—of calling attention to their activities. Tom Pickering is the exact opposite.

Q: Well then, you left there in 1969 and got what one could call a unique job in the Foreign Service, as Director General. How did that one come about?

BURNS: Throughout my years of service I was repeatedly assigned to personnel and administrative duties, despite my continual efforts to avoid them. My first Departmental job had been in old FP (for Foreign Personnel) and in those days, that—the first Departmental assignment—tended to “channel” one's career thereafter. I don't know why I tried to avoid them as the years passed I recognized the ultimate determining importance of that work. As a matter of fact, I found that so-called “political” officers were mostly personnel officers at heart. Certainly they were always willing to drop any other subject and talk about personnel assignments. As for the Director Generalship, the Deputy Under Secretary for Administration at the time of my appointment, Idar Rimestad, had been a friend and colleague in Paris and he was responsible for the advancement of my name. His successor, Bill Macomber, made no changes and he and I worked most cooperatively until my retirement. I have never received stauncher support from any superior than I received from Bill Macomber.

Q: You were the Director General from 1969 to '71. What was the job at that time?

BURNS: The Director General was, and I suppose still is, the principal personnel officer of the Foreign Service. Unless I am mistaken, it is the only position which is statutorily mandated to be filled by a career officer. The DG was responsible for every detail of personnel operations: staffing patterns, preparation of the personnel portion of the budget, recruitment, training, assignments, transfers, promotions, separations, titles and rank etc. The last mentioned became, to me, the most irksome of all the ramified questions with

which the DG had to cope. I became amazed at the number of individuals who would contend that, “I can't do this job unless I have the personal rank of minister”, or, “If I do not have a title making me eligible for inclusion on the diplomatic list I can't do this job”. It was as though I would have said that I could not do my job without what I have always regarded as the inflated title of Director General. I have never understood what the world “general” was meant to signify. I had not only little sympathy with these contentions, I regarded them as admissions of what I might term “phony” values and a complete misunderstanding of the fundamental role of the Foreign Service. The volume of this sort of thing, coming at the culmination of thirty years of duty, was miserably disillusioning.

Q: How would these things be resolved?

BURNS: I regret to say that they were often solved politically. Although we established presumably firm standards for titles, there were frequent, even multiple, appeals to higher authorities, many of the latter of whom—just to be rid of a nuisance—would dictate the granting of this or that title, or rank. Here, again, I want to emphasize that I have no recollection of the Deputy Under Secretary, Bill Macomber, ever overruling any decision in this area, even when he may not personally have agreed with what may possibly have been our overly rigorous application of title standards. But, although my immediate superior, Macomber also had to answer to higher authority and sometimes he would say, “We'll have to give in on this one”. Actually, twenty five years on, I recognize that I probably made too “big a deal” of all that. There was not any stemming the tide there, as there isn't in so many areas. As you know, titles have proliferated to the point that they are essentially meaningless. Perhaps the most distinguished one left is the simple “Mr.”

Q: Well, did you get involved with Presidential appointments of ambassadors and that sort of thing?

BURNS: Yes, to the extent of submitting recommendations. Again, we established standards to govern these recommendations by taking the names of the officers appearing

in the top 5% of the Class One and Class Two selection board rankings. This list would then be sent to the Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and other senior officers of the Department for any comment or recommendation they wished to make. Recently retired senior officers, of long and distinguished service, were also asked to comment although one or two—notably Loy Henderson—declined to do so. We would more or less "distill" all this into a short list which would be used by the Deputy Under Secretary and the geographic Assistant Secretary concerned, in coming up with a name to submit to the Secretary and the White House. A particular interest of mine in all this was stressing the importance of language facility. Other qualifications being roughly equal, I felt that an ability to converse in the language of the country concerned should be the determining element. This reflected my own experience of twice having been assigned to positions where my original inability to say more than "Hello" was an unquestioned severe handicap. This was a point of view enjoying by no means unanimous support—for obvious reasons. Another problem was coping with pressures from Assistant Secretaries in behalf of personal friends of theirs whose names did not appear in the top 5% of selection board lists. I had my own personal friends to contend with as well and I know I lost several who were offended because I did not support their desires for missions because they failed to meet the standards we established.

Q: How did the Foreign Service appointments fare during your time?

BURNS: Not badly. Bill Macomber was not a career officer but he was a strong supporter of the career service. President Nixon's scorn of the Foreign Service was well known but so far as ambassadorial appointments were concerned, the Service fared well under his administration.

Q: On the recruitment level, things were really beginning to heat up as far as the recruitment of more women and more minorities, particularly Blacks and to some extent Hispanics. How did that play during your time?

BURNS: There was not any significant change in the examining procedure while I was Director General and I am not familiar with the changes that have been made since. We did not have a so-called “affirmative action” program at that time and certainly nothing like established quotas. We were delighted to find promising candidates of minority groups and perhaps occasionally made a special effort to bring them in; but we did not have a policy of taking so many of this or that group. We looked for the individuals best qualified to do what the government required and I was well pleased with our results.

During my exactly two years as Director General there were two problems which, twenty five years later, stand out in memory as the most difficult and, in some respects, the most important that I faced during those two years. One involved the activity of a group of members of the American Foreign Service Association calling themselves—not very imaginatively—”Young Turks”. Their agenda was never specifically defined—at least I never saw it—but their objective was clear: a strong role in most every aspect of personnel operations. I found myself very much out of sympathy with the reasons for that objective which, in my opinion, was based on a “what's in it for me” motivation. The Foreign Service had always been noted for its esprit de corps and was not infrequently tagged with the politically pejorative term “elite”. The reasons for that were 1) its admissions standards were the highest of any branch of government service and 2) its requirements involved degrees of difficulty that many people were not willing to accept, such as going to places one might not want to go to, especially to live, and to stay as long as needed. I do not say that the dissolution of that was the specific objective of the “Young Turks”, I did believe that that would be the only logical result of their proposals. And twenty five years later I believe that that has been the result, a by-product of which has been to render the Foreign Service essentially irrelevant.

The other great question was the Foreign Service participation in the so-called CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development) program in Vietnam. We were instructed by the White House to second varying numbers of officers to this work, a

number which reached about 400 at one point, I believe. William Colby, later Director of the CIA, was in charge of the program and he left no doubt in my mind of the value he placed on the Foreign Service officers assigned to him. Nor did John Paul Vann, a man of some renown in the Vietnam conflict, when I went there to visit with almost all of our officers at their posts of duty. Many of these were arbitrarily sent there immediately upon entering the Foreign Service and I do not need to remind you of the views of a large segment of American youth—especially university youth—about the Vietnam War. That many did not want to go was not surprising. It was not because of danger or hardship that they objected; it was because of something much deeper than that and a number of them resigned rather than compromise profoundly held principles. I know this because I had hours of talks with many of them. All of this touched directly my belief in a disciplined Foreign Service, an arm of the executive branch of the government, bound to obey instructions or resign. I cannot deny that our involvement in Vietnam, and my continuing instructions to force young officers into the CORDS program, weighed heavily in the thinking that led to my retirement in 1971.

Q: I was Consul General in Saigon at that time.

BURNS: When I returned from that trip to Vietnam, I wrote a brief statement which appeared, as I recall, on the back cover of the State Department Bulletin. I don't know if you remember it; I am sure you saw it. There was an accompanying picture of me with John Paul Vann in front of his helicopter. I gave a lot of thought and time to what was, as I said, only a brief statement. I don't even have a copy of it but I recall the closing lines: “This is perhaps the most difficult demand ever placed on the Foreign Service. Our response will be the one the President has the right to expect.” My heart was not in it. Well, my heart was in it to the extent that I always believed that to be the role of the Foreign Service. But my own heart was not in it. Meanwhile the “Young Turks” had acquired an advance copy of the statement (they had an active underground) and I had a telephone call from one of their leaders who said, “I'm warning you, Mr. Burns, do not release that statement”, to which my response was simply, “It will appear in the next State

Department Bulletin". The "Young Turks" revenge took the form of heavy, and frequently successful, lobbying against any nomination to be chief of mission of any officer who had been assigned to the office of the Director General. They did this through associations they cultivated with the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. John Stutesman, director of the Vietnam Training Center and as gifted and superior officer as any with whom I worked during my thirty years, was a victim of this, something which I frustratingly deeply regretted for a number of years until I gradually came to understand that titles, rank etc. don't amount to a "hill of beans" in the long run and that, in Robbie Burns' words, "A man's a man for that".

Note: The following pages were not edited by Ambassador Burns

Q: Well you know the Young Turk Movement was an interesting thing. Actually my name was on part of the Young Turk thing, although I was a peripheral person, not particularly subscribing one way or the other. I was recruited to write something for training, because you know there was a long report for the 1970s or something like that. But my background was that of a Consular Officer and at some point I realized that a lot of the Young Turk Movement were middle-grade Political Officers who wanted to get rid of elderly Political Officers so they could get better jobs. They wanted people to step aside. Also it did involve some of the arrogance of what we used to call the '60s generation.

BURNS: Yes, that's true. They were all very bright. I enjoyed talking to them.

Q: But not much experience.

BURNS: Very definite ideas.

Q: Very definite ideas and very egocentric.

BURNS: You're quite right. I've become something of a fatalist in my old age and I really think, as the Spanish say, Que sera, sera. It was meant to be, people may influence the flow of events a little, but events are going to flow where they are going to go.

Q: Something I'd like to cover on this Director General period—what about women? Can you describe the role of women at that time?

BURNS: Oh yes! I have a personal vignette on the woman front. We certainly encouraged bright ladies, women, to come into the Foreign Service. But there was a young lady, I don't know how young, named Alison Palmer, who filed suit against me, not for anything I had done as Director General, I think I never saw the bill of indictment, but for her contention that I had blocked her assignment as Political Officer in Dar es Salaam because she was a woman. Actually all I had done was tell Alan Lukens, who was then the Personnel Officer for Africa—at least for our section of Africa—that given the limitations on our staff, we had only one Political Officer whoever it was had to speak Swahili, that's the only condition I ever laid down. Well Miss Palmer was campaigning for this particular job—why I never knew, I guess because it was coming open. George Roberts had been in Swahili training and he was assigned to the position. Miss Palmer was displeased and filed a complaint against me for discrimination because she was a woman which had nothing whatever to do with it. As a matter of fact I think she was quite an able officer over in the Congo where she had been working with Mac Godley, who spoke very well of her and I would have been glad to have her had she spoken Swahili. At any rate, she carried on a vendetta against me that continued into the years of the Director Generalship.

Q: What was the situation, we're talking the '69-'71 period, at one point if a woman Foreign Service Officer got married she had to resign. Had that been done away with at that time?

BURNS: Oh yes. I didn't know that had ever been the case.

Q: Yes, that was true at least until the early '60s. There were many women who married Foreign Service Officers who were resigned and were then reinstated.

BURNS: I had really never realized that. I must have known but I don't remember it.

Q: I can't state the time but up until the early '60s this was the case. It was somewhat the same as if you married a foreigner you had to resign. But for a woman if she married anyone. Was the recruitment of women a problem or an issue?

BURNS: Never. If there were any individual problems they never came to my attention. I think I would have known of any.

Q: What I'd like to do now is go back a little, if I may. In 1947 you left Rio and came back and worked in Personnel. What was your job? Where did your job fit in in that period?

BURNS: FP as it was called at the time was broken down into four areas, and I was in the Latin America area. There were four officers, one in charge of the whole area and three covering three sub areas. Mine was the River Plate countries, Brazil, and the Caribbean. We were in charge of all clerical assignments. The officer in charge, in consultation with the desk officer—this was before the organization of the Executive Bureaus that came later—of the officer assignments. So that's the way it was. That's one of the only two assignments that I had that I put my own hand in to engineer.

Q: How did that come about? Did you get any impression of ARA as a Bureau at that point? It always seemed such an enclosed entity within the Department of State, more than anywhere else.

BURNS: I thought in those days the Middle East was, well they all were, except for European. There was more interchange I thought between ARA and EUR. Oh, the FE group. And within the European group, the Eastern Europeans. But this was later that that developed. When I was Executive Director of the Bureau of European Affairs it was

the EE Group, the Russian language officers, that were just... They didn't want anyone telling them where anyone else was going to serve. They wanted to run their own private operation. And they ran a pretty good one. As long as it was running good I didn't want to argue with them.

Q: Back to this '47 to '49 period, did you feel the hand of McCarthyism at that time?

BURNS: It was just beginning, not quite. Those were the awful years when I was an inspector. It really hadn't started when I was in Personnel. It was kind of a relaxed period.

Q: Well you went to Haiti, Port au Prince, this was where you were really able to...

BURNS: Oh, that was the one I really wanted.

Q: Why did you want Haiti?

BURNS: I've always thought Haiti is a fascinating little country. Colorful history, and the Caribbean, very attractive of course. And I wanted to serve with the Ambassador who was there, William DeCourcy, who I had not known at all well personally but I had known him in the Department and he was just such an easy individual, so reasonable, just somebody I wanted to work for and I was glad I did. I might say this parenthetically right here—I had an unbroken series of chiefs that I admired and enjoyed working for. I never had one single unpleasant...in the 30 years.

Q: That's remarkable! For any job. Not that the Foreign Service is worse than anywhere else. Well, you were there from '49 to '52. What were you doing?

BURNS: Those were very active years. Ambassador DeCourcy was absent a lot. There was a committee called the Rowe, Ramstet, DeCourcy Committee for the reorganization of the Personnel system. One of those endless reorganizations that the Personnel system is always being put through. He was absent on that for a number of months, and then he decided to retire. He was asked to be Ambassador to Venezuela, but he told me: “I

would never go to an Embassy where I could not speak the language." That's a clue to the stature of this man. So he left, and I was charg# d'affaires I don't know how many months. The President of Haiti, who had thrown out his predecessor in one of those palace revolutions, named Paul Magloire, said to me, "I know now what that AI stands for behind your title—it stands for ad infinitum." I said, "I'm beginning to think so too."

Q: It actually stands for ad interim.

BURNS: It was a very long period and I enjoyed it immensely. Well, we did have certain interests in Haiti, major interests. Economic, and a lot of American visitors and that sort of thing, and cultural as well. Being at that time with the exception of Nigeria, the only independent Black nation in the world. So it was a very interesting assignment and one that I look back on with a lot of nostalgia.

Q: How did you and the Embassy deal with the Haitian government?

BURNS: Like any other government, through the foreign office.

Q: I mean did one deal mainly with the President?

BURNS: No, the Foreign Minister there was a good deal more effective than the ones in Africa.

Q: Because in some countries the Foreign Ministry can either be important or not.

BURNS: Yes. Many Americans don't seem to be aware of this, but the Haitians are very proud of the fact that they are the second to oldest independent nation in this hemisphere. They're older than any of the South American countries or Mexico as an independent nation. They're very proud of it because of the role they played in American history in that Napoleon had planned to use Haiti as the launching pad for the development of Louisiana as a huge colony when he became more embroiled with England and troubled both by the slave uprising in Haiti and an attack of yellow fever, which was really probably the

most effective thing he decided to throw it all up and called in Monroe, or whoever it was, Madison, and said, “I want to sell Louisiana.” The Haitians are very proud of it.

Q: How did they view the occupation by the Marines?

BURNS: There was no bitterness over that. The Marines were very well liked. They were over there a long time and people liked them; they said: Those were some of our best years. No, there was no backwash about that. Very little anti-white or anti-American feelings.

Q: I was doing an interview the other day of somebody who was saying they were going into the Old Executive Building where the State Department was at the time and a Marine guard ushered him in, he had been a sergeant there, and asked, “Is there still a white picket fence around the Toussaint L'Ouverture?” And they said, “Yes, there is.” And he said, “Well I had it put there. I thought he was a great man.”

Well, were there any particular issues in Port au Prince?

BURNS: No, none that I recall that were of any special moment. That was the first place I began to be aware of the pressures on the United Nations questions, irksome for the Haitians and for the Embassy. Especially irksome in little countries that have no influence. It's one thing to talk about major UN questions with the Great Powers and how things should be settled, but to try and apply pressure on these little countries with the veiled threat or promise of AID money I always found very distasteful and not at all helpful to diplomatic conduct of business.

Q: How did you find the Embassy dealt with the social problems of Haiti. From what I understand, and this goes back to the very earliest time, there has always been the lighter colored versus the darker color division. Were we too close to the elite, would you say? How did we treat that at the time?

BURNS: No, not really. They were in positions of influence because they had more money, most of them. Not all the people who had money were mulatto, or light colored, but most of them did. I felt no problem there. I had many black friends there. My closest friend was probably a man named Clement Jemel, who later went into the Cabinet and later was assassinated under Duvalier. Practically everyone I knew disappeared under Duvalier. White or Black. I knew Duvalier. He was the head of the Haitian-American Health Organization. I thought he was a rather mousy little man. I had no idea that he was capable of the things he was subsequently accused of, I'm quite sure appropriately. But no, there was no feeling of that nature. There were...the whites, other than the Embassy and the Government people did tend to hang completely together. There was a club there called the Petionville Club, which was limited to white members. My feeling toward clubs has always been rather casual. If everyone with blue eyes wants to have a club it's perfectly alright with me. I don't have blue eyes—I don't care. I'll have blue-eyed friends outside of the club. If you want to have a club only for left-handed people who play chess, I don't care. That never bothers me. But what did bother me in Haiti was that they had this club, which was really sort of like a foreigner's club, lots of places have foreigners clubs. But we had a Black Agricultural Attach#, the first Black officer that had ever been assigned to the American Embassy in Haiti, and they refused to accept him as a member. He was a foreigner, he was an American. There were no Black embassies in Haiti in those days. So when I arrived I did not join the Petionville Club. There was quite a lot of pressure from friends in the American community, not from the Embassy, but I didn't. I began to feel this was creating an unpleasant situation in Port au Prince, which is a rather small community, and it was making me the focus of...”Oh here this advocate or activist...” It didn't seem to bother Giles Hubert. He never mentioned it to me, although he knew that was the reason I didn't join the Petionville Club. But when Ambassador DeCourcy was leaving on this rather long absence of about three or four months, I said, this was the first time we had raised the question, he belonged, and he was a great golfer, he loved it, played almost every day. I said, “Do you find this a troubling situation as far as the Embassy's position here in Port au Prince is concerned? I'm not making any speeches about this, the only thing I am doing is

just not joining. But it seems to be much talked about the longer I'm here." And he said, "I do think it would be..." I don't remember what he said, something about it having a calming or relaxing effect if I joined. So I did, and I was always very sorry about it. Quite sorry that I didn't quietly hold out. But anyway, there isn't any...I've approached a lot of questions during my 30 years from that point of view...—End tape 2, begin tape 3, side A

BURNS: ...my philosophy I've already stated, the que sera sera thing. If things are flowing in a direction and it's already going to happen you might influence it one way or the other, but... So I'm afraid that I've never been a confrontationist...nor was I on the CORDS question, though I didn't think I was in a position of enough authority, I thought it would have been presumptuous, really, of me. I was simply in a policy implementation position, not a policy formulation position.

Q: Of course, there it would have been a real thing. It was a real, fundamental policy issue. Should we have been in Vietnam or not.

BURNS: I haven't mentioned this to anyone else and it would be presumptuous of me to make any comparison, but I had to think of my own thoughts of those days in connection with the McNamara book, which I haven't read but I have read about. Of course he was in a policy formulation position, and I was way down the line in a position that had nothing to do with the military. But there was a thread, the same thread ran through there. And the same sort of thing... Of course he was a policymaker too, Cyrus Vance. I always thought so highly of the manner in which he resigned.

Q: Well people don't resign much at the policymaking level. Below that there is a problem. After all you are a government servant and you are there to implement the policy and if people keep resigning all the time at the working level it doesn't make for good government. Whereas at the policy level it does make for good government for people to resign on principle.

Well, back to what I think was an important job. You were an inspector at an important time, from '52, you left Haiti in '52 and became an inspector. And I wonder, could you talk...it was an interesting period and it got you around to see things. How did the inspection system work in the '52-'54 period?

BURNS: We were given a very broad area of comment and I used it a good deal. I enjoyed those two years immensely. But we were supposed to...basically Tom Wailes, Edward T. Wailes was the Chief Inspector and he had set up this system. He was essentially a political officer himself, he had never worked in the administrative field, although later he was the Assistant Secretary for Administration.

What is the purpose of this office, this consulate. What is the objectives, define them, are they being accomplished, if not, why not, analyze the weaknesses for the performance of the mission, either in personnel, in facilities, in budget, or whatever, in support from the Department. I offended a number of people in the Department. I wrote from Perth, Australia about one minor, minor thing. Especially from Rangoon, I got in big trouble. But anyway, I could write about anything I wanted to and I really enjoyed it. I really did.

Q: Let's talk about a couple of places. One, you mentioned you were in the Soviet Union.

BURNS: Well now, that was ridiculous, that I should have been sent to the Soviet Union. They used to inspect on a calendar, and that was the last inspection that I made. I don't recall the exact details but someone became ill and there was a big shuffling of assignments. I had been inspecting in Denmark and Finland, and whoever had been assigned to the Russian inspection either became ill or was assigned to some other post, maybe it was the latter, I don't remember. It was a very senior inspector. So I was sent in there, alone! I didn't even have an administrative inspector. I will say that I later thanked him, he became a close friend and neighbor here in Georgetown, Chip Bohlen, whom I don't even think I had met before I walked into his office in Moscow. I said, “At least you had the grace not to laugh out loud.” It was of course ridiculous. I knew nothing

about Eastern European affairs, which had always operated like a tight fraternity, and I hadn't been involved in European politics. Coming fresh from almost three years in Haiti to inspect...! Well, it worked very well, as a matter of fact. I made lots of friends who are still my friends in that inspection, of course it didn't amount to anything because they had almost a running inspection in those days. Their operation was so close and tight-knit, the Department knew exactly what was going on in Moscow. So that was that.

Q: What about...Wristonization was just beginning to start then, or had it?

BURNS: It started a year or two before that.

Q: And this was the joining of basically the Civil Service and the Foreign Service into one service and making everybody serve overseas.

BURNS: Yes, it was that to some extent, especially the old staff corps and the career Foreign Service. But it opened the Foreign Service to those in the Department but it didn't entirely do away with the Civil Service influence in the Department of State, I believe.

Q: How was that amalgamation working at that time?

BURNS: Well, I found a great deal to criticize about it, myself at that time. It was another of the watering down of the old, to use that ugly word, elite corps of the Foreign Service. I think a lot of very fine officers came in through the Wriston program but I think maybe a lot who didn't strengthen the Foreign Service, shall we say.

Q: What about McCarthyism?

BURNS: That was a miserable problem during all the time I was in the Inspection Corps. This was easy to read, the terrible effects that this had on morale, both personal and as a group. I don't think the Foreign Service has ever recovered from McCarthyism.

Q: Could you explain what the impact was and, you don't have to name names, but some of the problems.

BURNS: Well, I think the pillorying, or the unjust accusations hurled at various individuals on completely groundless bases, maybe nothing more than slanderous conjecture overheard. I was queried once when I was in the Inspection Corps about one of these women in the Embassy in Rio. One of the cornerstones of the Embassy. Anyway, she was a lady of pronounced liberal views. I had had a number of arguments with her myself. I worked very closely with her, right in the Ambassador's office. She was a very bright, very effective, completely devoted American, but as I say of pronounced and often-stated liberal views. I was questioned by the Office of Security about this lady, and I responded to everyone. It was in the Inspection Corps headquarters, where we had large rooms with maybe as many as five or six desks in the room. I was sitting at my desk, and there was one other inspector in the room at the time, and this FBI agent, I don't know if he was FBI or with the Office of Security, I believe he was FBI. At the close of this maybe half hour of querying he said, “Then may I say that there is no doubt whatever in your mind about the loyalty of Mrs. Blank?” And I said, “Not the slightest.” He got up and left and the other inspector turned around and said, “John, you're a fool.” And I said, “What do you mean?” He said, “You should never make as categorical a statement as you have just made about anybody. It could come back on you.” I said, “I'd hate to think that anyone who knew me as well as I know that person would fail to stand up for me to that extent. I will base my own reputation on what I have just said about this lady.” That's an example.

Q: Well, were you given a brief, whether you wanted it or not, to go out and check on loyalty?

BURNS: No, we had none of that. We had very little to do with security.

Q: The inspectors play a role that's not in the job description, but a way of passing on tribal knowledge of the Foreign Service, going from post to post. I wrote a history of the

Consular Service in the old days and in 1906 they established Consuls General at large, and there were six of them and they would go around and talk and inspect. Did you find that you were carrying on, telling such things about McCarthyism and the problems it was creating within the Department as you went around?

BURNS: No, I wasn't carrying around any information. They already had it. It was something akin to the Nazi knock in the middle of the night when they'd see perfectly innocent people treated the way they were. Most especially following that trip of Cohn and Schine to Germany.

Q: These were two staff members of the McCarthy Committee who were particularly obnoxious, both of whom met miserable ends, probably well deserved.

BURNS: What happened to Schine?

Q: I think he was stabbed to death.

BURNS: Oh, well I couldn't really care less. He went through the Bonn Embassy, this was before I was there but a friend, a very valued friend, Glen Wolfe was the Administrative Officer during the visit of Cohn and Schine. And later he told me...he was a battler, he was not one to say “que sera, sera.” He went into the ring on several of these false accusations that were made, not against him but against members of the staff at the Embassy. And he himself, as a result, became so in McCarthy's personal bad books that he was brought back here and the Director of Security of the Department of State said, “You can sit right here outside my office for a while and cool off and then you can go up and make your peace with McCarthy, and then we'll see about your next assignment.” And Glen said, “I have no peace to make with Senator McCarthy. If he wants to apologize to me for what he has done to my friends and to other perfectly innocent people in the Bonn High Commissioner's office, I'll be glad to accept his apology for what he has done. But I have

nothing to say to him." And I think that kept Glen Wolfe from ever going much further in the Foreign Service.

Anyway, everywhere I went it was the same way. If this can happen...it was sort of like Oklahoma City, this can happen here it can happen anywhere.

Q: We're speaking about a bomb that went off in the federal building in Oklahoma City just about ten days ago.

Did you see any particular problem areas as you traveled around? Any posts that were particularly bad at the time?

BURNS: No, it restored my confidence in and admiration for the Foreign Service and the people that make it up. I saw people who were working under very difficult conditions, cheerfully, and if anything renewed my faith in the elitism, it was that time in the Inspection Corps. Because maybe people who hadn't been so elite turned elite when they got out there. Those were the days before the R&R trips and the "I don't want to go there" and "I don't want to go anywhere that my wife can't work." So those were the days when wives themselves worked with the wife of the principal officer, and loved doing it and were very effective representatives of the United States themselves, in some respects more so than their husbands, in their own personal world and the social, not only the social but the cultural world and everything. That's a great loss. I'm told now that no senior officer would think of calling on the wife of any one of his officers for help. It's kind of hard on bachelors, or it would be. I couldn't have gotten along without Alice Pickering in Dar es Salaam.

Q: Well, you then went as Consul General to Frankfurt from '55 to '57. That's where we met. You mentioned that you were uncomfortable not being a German language officer.

BURNS: Not even knowing any German!

Q: What did you see as your main job? I mean this was a huge hatching ground for Foreign Service officers, for one thing.

BURNS: Well I enjoyed that. You came somewhat later.

Q: I came just after you arrived.

BURNS: Well, I don't remember, I remember there was a bunch of you and we did shuffle you around a bit. Do you remember by any chance when I went down for some sort of curious session in Nice and brought back that stuff and we got...

Q: I remember this vividly, because you brought back case studies and it's the only time I've seen this used in the Foreign Service and I thought it was an excellent experience. Could you talk a little about your impression of how this worked?

BURNS: Well this was a, I can't recall under what auspices this session was held in Nice, but there must have been 20 officers, I remember Bob McIlvaine, he's now one of my closest friends, he was the Deputy Chief of Mission in Lisbon, was there, I can't remember, but they came from all over Europe and they had these various cases and at the end the question was what would you do in this particular instance? And there was a good deal of argument and discussion among the officers about how they would solve this particular problem. At any rate, I brought them all back to Frankfurt and I enjoyed presenting them to you young fellows.

Q: I thought it worked very well because it was the first time I was exposed, and almost the only time, to kind of the collective people tackling a problem and looking at it as a profession, which I think is important. To understand how, to set up theoretical cases based on real problems and what do you do, and see how other minds work.

BURNS: I enjoyed working with those young officers very much. That may have been another thing...although I was interested in personnel, I wanted to do other things in

the Foreign Service I seem to have done more of that. There was one very unhappy circumstance in Frankfurt which I regretted a lot and it goes back to my first Consul General picking up those regulations and saying... I had asked the non-immigrant visa office to please be very...I mean lean overboard to create a good atmosphere and there wasn't going to be much problem there. And there was a young officer, you may remember, he was a Jewish boy, anyway he did something which raised security questions and that was unfortunately...

Q: He wasn't stopping anybody, I think we all heard about this.

BURNS: I think it was a fairly minor...

Q: The problem was I think we would issue visas, derogatory information would sometimes come in afterwards, and the idea was you'd have somebody stop him from going or something, and he wasn't taking action on it.

BURNS: That isn't my memory of it. Whatever happened happened without my knowledge. At any rate, I didn't feel kindly towards the head of the visa section or toward Oscar Holder, who was the Deputy Consul General at being quite so hard on this boy. At any rate, he had to leave the Service, he was never promoted. There were never any charges presented against him. But what I worried about was that whatever he had done, he had done as a result of my counsel to let's think of the individual more than we think of the form that we are serving. And actually the floods of calls and comments that I had had from German friends said that the atmosphere at the non-immigrant visa section has entirely changed. It is wonderful now. But anyway, it didn't seem to bother him. When he later came back I was working for the Deputy Under Secretary Loy Henderson. He came back and it was clearly his last assignment and I asked him—Meyer Glickman—if he would like me to undertake any action on his behalf. I felt that it was partially my problem. And he said, “Oh no, I think it's probably for the best. Maybe this is the way it's supposed to be.”

Sort of like the que sera, sera, and he was quite an able officer. I never worked closely with him...

End of interview